

# It's Up to YOU to Prevent the Flu

Utah and the Nation will face yet another influenza (flu) season with limited supplies of flu vaccine. Not only is it flu season, but it is also cough and head cold season, so it is especially important for everyone to take an active part to prevent the spread of all viruses this winter.

You can protect yourself and others. Here's how:

- If you're healthy and not at risk for complications from the flu, leave the remaining flu shots for those who need the vaccine the most.
- Utahns at high risk should call their health care provider, local health department or the immunization hotline to find a flu shot. (1-800-275-0659)
- All Utahns need to practice good "respiratory etiquette" to reduce the spread of respiratory diseases.
- Stay away from other people when you are sick including at work and school.
- Cover your mouth and nose when you cough or sneeze—use a tissue or your elbow.
- Wash your hands frequently for at least 20 seconds.

It is important for schools and employers to be supportive of these practices in order to reduce absenteeism and prevent the flu virus from spreading. Another way to prevent the virus from spreading is to "Ask for a Mask" when visiting health care offices and hospitals.

The "Ask for a Mask" message encourages those who visit health care buildings to ask for a mask if they have a fever with cough or rash, and to wear it during their visit. Signs will be posted and distributed widely in hospital and doctor's waiting rooms where the sick often expose others to their germs. These signs reinforce the basics of "respiratory etiquette" which include covering your mouth and nose every time you sneeze or cough, placing used tissues into the trash, washing hands well and often with soap and water and/or using an alcohol hand sanitizer.

Of course, the first line of defense when you're sick is to stay home and away from social situations such as church, shopping, holi-



day gatherings, school or work. Also, consider a greeting other than a handshake to help keep germs from infecting others.

"Simple surgical masks are an effective, low-tech way to keep many respiratory illnesses from spreading in healthcare settings," said Dr. Robert Rolfs, State Epidemiologist, UDOH. "Health care professionals are used to wearing masks, but this will be something new for patients or visitors to health care facilities. I urge Utahns to take these basic infection control measures to heart and do their part to help reduce the spread of respiratory illnesses."

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## What is influenza (the flu)?

Influenza, commonly called "the flu," is a contagious disease caused by the influenza virus, which infects the respiratory tract (nose, throat, lungs). The flu is different from a cold. The flu usually comes on suddenly and may include these symptoms:

- Fever
- Headache
- Body aches
- Fatigue (can be extreme)
- Dry cough
- Sore throat
- Nasal congestion

## How soon will I get sick if I am exposed and how long am I contagious?

The time from when a person is exposed to flu virus to when symptoms begin is about 1-4 days. The flu typically lasts for 7-10 days. Adults may be contagious from 1 day prior to becoming sick and for 3-7 days after they first develop symptoms. Some children may be contagious for longer than a week.

**Here are a few other things to remember:**

■ **Antibiotics are not effective against the flu!**

The flu is caused by a virus, so antibiotics (like penicillin) don't work to cure it. The decision to use an antibiotic should always be made by your doctor. Inappropriate use of antibiotics can lead to antibiotic resistant bacteria that are more difficult to treat.

■ **Do not give aspirin to a child or teenager who has the flu!**

Never give aspirin to children or teenagers who have flu-like symptoms—and particularly fever—without first speaking to your doctor. Giving aspirin to children and teenagers who have the flu can cause a rare but serious illness called Reye Syndrome.

■ **Can I get a pneumonia shot at the same time as my flu shot?**

Yes, in fact, the pneumonia shot can be given any time of the year. While flu shots must be taken every year, only one life-time dose of pneumonia vaccine is needed for most persons aged 65 years or older. **UTH**